

## **As We Went Kneeling Through the Dark** by vcatrashfiend

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**Summary:** In which Jim and Joyce spend a productive February day together after Joyce's wood heater breaks down

## As We Went Kneeling Through the Dark

All characters, except for Maude and Brendan belong to The Duffer Brothers. Once again, I am just taking them out for the spin. Title and song referenced in the text belong to Leonard Cohen's "So Long Marianne", which is in my top ten of songs that remind me of Jopper. You can listen to it, here: [watch?v=cZI6EdnvH-8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZI6EdnvH-8)

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### Work Text:

Joyce Byers was having a very nice dream. It was a variation on one that she used to have in her teen years, altered exquisitely by the fact that she no longer possessed rudimentary knowledge of the subject matter. In her dream, strong fingers danced a frustratingly slow and feather-like path up her thighs, while a rich, deep voice whispered all the filthy things it had planned for her. She strained to hear these plans; they were impossible to make out, even though the person whispering them was so close, she could feel the electric thrill of his beard rubbing against the sensitive skin of her neck, while his strong lips teased and nipped at her earlobe. And those fingers would stroke and skip around the soaked epicenter of her need, until...

Her alarm went off and she was jolted awake by hands nudging her shoulder insistently. Joyce's sleep smudged eyes adjusted to the blinding light of the February morning sun, and she saw that her youngest son, Will, was standing at her bedside, eyes wide and breath come out in puffy little clouds... wait, what?

"Mom, the heater isn't working." It sure wasn't. Once Joyce sat up in bed, throwing off the heavy comforter that had been encasing her, she realized that the entire room felt like it was built out of ice. The tip of her nose burned unpleasantly, and was quickly beginning to feel numb. Will was wrapped in his own blanket, shivering pathetically.

"Baby, it's your job to make sure there's wood in the fire-box. Did you

forget to do it last night?' Her voice was soft, without a hint of accusation.

Will shook his head emphatically. "I did fill it, Mom, honestly I did!"

She sat at the edge of the bed and pulled him to her side, kissing the top of his head and embracing him. "Shhh, don't worry about it; I believe you. Go wake up Jonathan and start the oven. I'll make a tray of bacon and see if that will heat up the house a bit. Skeedaddle, I'll be out in a minute."

It was that damn water jacket, Joyce knew that already. She had told Mr. Cobb, the landlord, about a million times that it wasn't going to last another winter. Rusted out piece of junk. As she dressed, pulling two wooly sweaters and thick dungarees over fleece long johns – fine attire for her one and only day off of the month! –she mentally rehearsed the talking points she would use against each and every one of Mr. Cobb's excuses. Rehearsal was the only way she was able to manage confrontations without being crushed under the weight of her considerable anxiety.

Mr. Cobb, Corner Cutting Extraordinaire, bargained with Joyce.

"Shucks, Joyce. I'm going to be out of town this weekend, and I barely was able to take this call. I'm not going to have time to call a guy-"

"I'll do it. My kids can't stay in this house. They will freeze to death!"

"I just want to make sure we get the best deal for the job..." She heard him humming after he trailed off. Probably thinking about the best way to screw me over. Joyce was certain this would not end well for her.

"Tell you what, Joyce. You're handy around the house, why don't you do it? If you fix it, I will take off half a month of rent."

"The parts will cost more than what I pay for this place, Mr. Cobb. There is frost on the damn walls over here!"

"Okay, Joyce, don't get hysterical. A whole month's rent and when I get back from Florida I will reimburse you 20 percent of the cost of

materials."

Joyce sighed. "Fine."

Her next call was to the Wheeler residence. She felt terrible for constantly relying on Karen in these situations, but she knew her childhood best friend would have no problem with taking the boys and the dog in until heat returned to the house. As usual, Karen accepted the situation with grace and kindness. She even offered to send a repairman herself and pay for it, but Joyce flat out refused. Karen may be well off, but Joyce was not a charity case. She wanted to put the boys up in the Wheeler house because motherly concern trumped pride, but she did not need to be treated like she was a breath away from the poor-house.

Boys and dog sent away, fire-box situation confirmed and prepped for a day of labor, Joyce headed into town to pick up supplies. The heater in her car was broken too, which was just the cherry on top of the sundae that was her Sunday. She walked into the hardware store, list of supplies in hand, and walked up to the counter. Maude Phillips, a girl in Jonathan's class and the daughter of the store owner, smiled warily at her.

"Hi, Mrs. Byers, how can I help you?" Joyce handed over the list, explaining the situation in layman's terms. Maude studied the list, and called for her father, who greeted Joyce more warmly than his daughter, when he bounded up to the front counter.

"Cobb finally opening his wallet wide enough to let the moths fly out?" Brendan Phillips inquired, giving a low whistle at the list of supplies.

"No, this is coming out of my pocket." Brendan gave her a sympathetic look, one chock-full of the cooing pity that Joyce detested, and set off to fetch her supplies. Maude and Joyce stood in awkward silence while they waited for his return, the younger girl studying her fingernails, and Joyce staring at the ceiling.

The little bell above the front door jingled as a new customer entered the store. Joyce was still counting the tiles on the ceiling when she heard her name. She looked over and blushed deeply when she saw

the star of her early morning dream smiling sheepishly at her.

"H-hop... hi." She gave him a shy smile in return.

"Here you go, Joyce!" Brendan rolled up a cart filled with supplies. Jim Hopper observed the materials with a quizzical look.

"Wood-heater needs repairs," she explained.

"I didn't know you owned that house, Joyce."

Joyce sighed. "I don't."

Jim frowned, blue eyes narrowing in disapproval. "That's usually a job for maintenance."

"Hmm. Yes, you would think."

"Cobb's a cheap son of a bitch, Chief," Brendan added, wincing when Maude giggled at his use of expletive.

"Horace Cobb? Not surprising." Joyce felt her body tense up and the little hairs on the back of her neck stand on end as Jim closed the distance between them, placing a familiar hand on her shoulder. "Do you want me to talk to him, Joyce?" She knew he wasn't teasing, there was an earnestness in his eyes that belied his impish smirk.

Joyce found herself staring at his lips. "N-no... I don't want any trouble." She shifted uncomfortably under the weight of his scrutiny. She was both touched and exasperated by the interest he had shown in her life as of late. If they were dating, the attentiveness would have felt less annoying, but he had not made a move in that direction. She knew he had a reputation of getting around, and his conquests had been the stuff of legend up until a few months ago; however, she was not aware of any new relationships... if that is what one would exactly call them.

"It's not any trouble. He's out of his mind if he thinks it's okay to make you fix that hunk of junk out in this weather! It's ten degrees outside, and it's only going to be any better come night fall. A project like that is going to take hours!"

"Ring me up, Maude - Look, Hop, this isn't the first time that I've had to do maintenance on my house. I'm not a baby!"

Maude read out the total, and there was a sharp intake of breath from Jim. He reached into his trouser pocket for his wallet. Joyce noticed, glared at him, and moved to create a blockade between the counter and him. "I've got this." She pulled the money out of her purse, and plunked it down in front of Maude.

"Grown women get frostbite- Will you let me at least pay some of this? -Don't take that money, Maude!"

Maude and her father exchanged exasperated looks. Both of them felt like intruders in the argument that was brewing.

"Take the money, Maude." Joyce's eyes burned into Maude's, mouth set in a firm line, arms crossed in front of her chest. Maude looked panicked, eyes darting between Jim and Joyce as though trying to decide who posed the biggest threat.

"Dad...?"

Brendan finally stepped in. "Look, you two – and no disrespect, Chief! - I've got a business to run here. I really don't care who pays, so long as they pay. I'm not running a charity, and I'm definitely not conducting couple's therapy. This is a hardware store."

Joyce and Jim glared daggers at Brendan.

"We're not... You know what, Joyce? Fine. You pay, but please let me come over and help you with repairs."

"Is that all it takes to get you to drop the Daddy Warbucks act? Sure, Hop. Come over and help." Maude sighed in relief, made change, and handed Joyce her receipt. Joyce practically stormed out, with Jim scrambling behind, carrying the supplies.

Later, they worked together to fix the heater, temperature dropping rapidly.

"Td still like to take that bastard to task, Joyce. This is unacceptable." He handed her a wrench, cold seeping through his Kevlar gloves.

Joyce shivered violently as she began switching out the old water jacket. She didn't reply, intent on making the repairs as swiftly as possible.

"It's getting dark, we can finish this in the morning." Joyce nodded in agreement, and nearly squealed as he put his hands around her waist to help her down from the ladder.

They walked into the house, and Joyce gasped at how frigid it was even through her protective layers of clothing. Her teeth immediately began to chatter.

"You aren't staying here," Jim announced, guiding her to the front door. Joyce shook his arm off of her shoulders. His touch burned, even though it was as cold inside the house as it was outside.

"It's fine."

"Nooo, it's not. I'll take you to back to my trailer. It's a mess, but you won't die of exposure."

"I don't want to have to leave the boys at the Wheelers any longer than I have to- "

"We will come back here first thing, I promise. It's either that, or we stay here and sleep skin to skin to generate heat." The suggestion took the wind out of Joyce, and the room was suddenly an inferno. Her mind went to a time, years ago, when they had been teenagers and his car had broken down on the road in the middle of the night, miles from town. It had been cold that night, too – but, they had both been confident in their dating situation and the seeming permanence of it to act on their needs. He had been so strong, so reverent and intuitive... She thought she would never stop wanting him then, and she did not know how to ask for him now.

"Oh." She found it difficult to look him in the eyes, so she stared at the ground, feeling him staring intently at her, waiting for an answer.

"I... at my house there is at least a couch for one of us. It will be perfectly innocent, Joyce. I swear this isn't some weak attempt at getting you into my bed... I mean, unless you want to take the bed.

The couch is comfy too."

"I'll take you – your offer! – I'll take you up on your offer." She was aware that they had nearly closed the distance between them during the exchange. She had to crane her neck to look up at him, and the vapor from their breaths mingled in the frigid room. She had always been envious of how crystalline blue his eyes were, even though, in another lifetime he had said hers reminded him of fine brandy.

"Good."

They took his car back to his trailer. When Joyce let it slip that the heat was gone in her car, he promised that he would work on that after the fire-box was in working order. She rolled her eyes and sarcastically informed him that he could knock himself out doing so.

He was not kidding about the mess. Joyce, single mother of two boys, cringed as he moved the pizza boxes and beer cans from the couch to an over-taxed trash can. He shook off the afghan that had been thrown haphazardly over the back of the couch and carefully laid it out as though the act had magically made the furniture safe to sleep on. At least it was warm.

"If you are going to be working on my car and my fire-box, I am coming over to clean this place," she announced, shucking off her coat, removing her hat, gloves and scarf, setting them down on the back of an arm chair, and automatically moving to the couch to straighten the throw pillows. She noticed that he had missed some crumbs on the couch, so she removed the afghan, and began to brush the remainders with swift, nervous swipes of her hand. She looked up from her busy work to see that he was studying her with a boyish grin on his lips, and a blush in his cheeks. She thought he looked very handsome when he had the temerity to blush, and devastating when he took the occasion to grin. It had been that winsome expression that had sent her into such a tizzy in her junior year of High School. "What exactly is so amusing?" She was smirking, her eyes were sly and her tone was teasing.

"Little Mouse, cleaning up my room for old time's sake." Joyce laughed at his use of her old nickname. It had been something only he had called her, and she had not heard that name in a very, very



long time. It felt like a warm embrace. Like a different, less complicated time. It made her feel bold.

"What's next, Hop? Are we going to move your mattress to the floor so your parents can't hear the bed springs squeak?" His laughter was rich and booming, shaking her to her very core, stirring something gone but not forgotten, deep inside her heart. He pulled her into a tight hug, kissing the top of her head. The spontaneity of the move caused her to tense up, but she quickly relaxed into his arms, and they stood there for a few moments before he spoke:

"I've been thinking about that a lot lately," he murmured against her hair, sending a delicious thrill of desire from her scalp down to her toes, and back up, settling into the now aching spot between her legs. She looked up at him, hoping to see the want in his eyes. She was not disappointed.

Jim released his hold on her, and brought his hands up to frame her small face, his thumbs making slow, gentle circles at her cheekbones.

"What'll it be, Joyce?" She closed her eyes in response, which was all the invitation he needed to bring his lips down gently against her own, brushing against them, before deepening the kiss, and coaxing her mouth open. She sighed, and obeyed the command of his body language, pressing herself flush against him, and reaching up to throw her arms about his shoulders. His hands travelled downwards to cup her ass, lifting her up to meet his height.

"You don't have to sleep on the couch you know," she murmured breathlessly, when they finally parted for air. He had not set her down. He was holding onto her for dear life, eyes never leaving her swollen lips. She was reminded of a time when he used to bite gently on her bottom lip, telling her that he was addicted to it, that it was meant for nibbling. He used to say a lot of things that made her feel desirable. Things Lonnie never deigned to say, for fear of sounding "like a fruit".

"I think that is something that I get to say to you." She did not get a chance to respond, he was kissing her again, and with renewed vigor. Her sex-starved brain foggily registered that he was moving, carrying her down the hallway. Finally! Cheered the voice in her head. They

were going to his bedroom, to his bed, and she was going to get fucked, good and proper. She knew it was going to be good and proper, too. Word around town was that he was distant, non-committal, and completely undiscerning, but not that he was a shitty lay. It was something that she had wanted to happen since... had this really been on her mind since he got back into town almost five years ago? (It was getting difficult to think with his teeth nipping lightly at her ears, and his tongue...) Maybe the desire had not been outright noticeable, but it had increased considerably since they emerged from the Upside Down; and now it was happening. Fuck, she was thinking too much again. She had been thinking so much, that she had not even realized that she was lying on her back, on his bed, and he kneeling over her, working to divest her of her dungarees.

She forced herself to become present in the situation, and assisted him, kicking the bulky dungarees and long john bottoms to the end of the bed, and sitting up to remove her sweaters. Once she was down to her bra and panties, she regretted the fact that they weren't more exciting. Just a plain old white mom bra and plain old egg-shell, high-waist mom panties. Because she was a mother, and mother's didn't have impromptu sleepovers with the Chief of Police and-

"Joyce, you are so fucking beautiful," he voice was hoarse, thick with desire. Somewhere in her reverie, he had been able to strip down to his blue Henley and boxer briefs -Joyce's eyes were drawn down to the impressive bulge straining against the fabric as he knelt on the bed. The sight made her feel dizzy. She had almost forgot how impressive it was. The disappointed, sinking feeling she had gotten the first time she had seen Lonnie's (why couldn't they all be that big?) and the subsequent disappointed feeling she had experienced when-

"Stop staring at my dick and say something."

"Wha-?"

"You look like you've just seen a ghost. Not exactly flattering."

Joyce mentally shook off the increasingly unpleasant reminiscence and smiled. She had promised Lonnie would never have a place in her bed again, and she was pretty sure Jim would appreciate it if she

kept the bastard out of his as well.

"I guess I'm having a hard time believing that I'm here."

He moved quickly to convince her of her own presence, kissing her with renewed urgency, sucking and biting at her overworked mouth to the point where she knew she would have to ice it in the morning, but it didn't matter because those big, strong hands were removing her bra with a deft skill that Joyce knew he had picked up over the years- maybe from Diane (Stop it!)-and his calloused thumbs were circling deliciously around her aching, erect nipples.

"Beautiful, beautiful," he whispered his mantra against her mouth, and then ghosted his lips over her cheekbones, down to her neck, where he stopped briefly to feast with gentle teeth and teasing tongue. His hands drifted away from her breasts, travelling lightly down her ribcage, which made Joyce squirm and giggle, down to her hips, her thighs, her knees. Joyce arched her back when his mouth found her nipples, the electric sensation of his biting and sucking turning her body to liquid, and ending in a pool of warmth between her thighs. His hands were caressing her from knee to upper-thigh, slipping his thumbs under the fabric of her panties a little more on each pass, his lips kissing a path down her tummy to the crux of her want.

"Hop, you really don't have to if you don't want to..." she attempted to sit up in order to halt his progress. Joyce remembered that it had not been something he had been eager to do when they were teens. He gently guided her onto her back, lifting his head in order to meet her eyes.

"I want to, Jesus fuck, do I ever. Do you want me to?" In his eyes, desire mingled with reverent concern.

"Yes, please."

So he did. Another trick he had picked up throughout the years, and a very good one too. Joyce's toes curled so tightly that they nearly cramped up, as Jim teased and tasted (Was he writing his name with his tongue?) her dripping center. She tried not to think of the marks that his beard would undoubtedly leave on the tender flesh of her

thighs as it scraped and tickled in tandem with his worshipful mouth. When he slid two fingers inside of her, pumping with vigor, and withdrawing to make slick little whorls around her swollen clit, Joyce nearly lost vision and blacked out. Her thighs were trembling in anticipation of her building orgasm, and her cries were so desperate that she thought it a miracle that he didn't have anyone living nearby. She was climbing higher and higher to that precipice that she hadn't ascended to in years, even during her "private time", and if only he would keep up that pace of licking, and pumping and teasing-

No sooner did she come crashing down on the waves of the strongest orgasm she had had in years, he was moving over her, nudging her legs further apart, and catching her mouth with his so that she could taste herself. After several moments of this, he rolled over to the side of the bed, and fumbled through the drawer of his nightstand. After the safety of their mission was assured, He slid inside of her, and Joyce's breath came in sharp. Jim froze.

"Am I hurting you?" He feathered her forehead and mouth with kisses, shifting his weight onto his elbows so that he wasn't crushing her, his cock throbbing deep inside of her. She shook her head, slid her hands to his hips and pulled him closer. He was big. Much larger than what she was used to, which was nothing. The delightful ache of anticipation turned sharp and hot the second he entered her, and it had left her speechless. She wanted more, and she rotated her hips, relaying the message in a language other than words. Message received. They moved together wordlessly; communicating their mutual enjoyment through grunts, sighs, and low moans.

Joyce wrapped her legs about his waist, constantly seeking ways to get closer and tighter against him. His thrusts became harder, desperate, and erratic upon adjusting to the new angle. Joyce's head dropped back against the pillow, losing herself to the fire and electricity thrumming through her body. She had never, ever come three times during sex that wasn't a solo flight. She whispered, "I love you" against the side of his neck, and bit down as her entire world shattered and blurred. He soon followed, finishing with brutal thrusts and desperate kisses that sometimes missed her mouth. He rested, trembling and spent against the curve of her neck, having the

foresight to not collapse on top of her. A hand came up to stroke her damp hair and she wondered if he had heard her declaration.

"Jim, are you alright?"

He chuckled against her neck. "You held on to me like I was a crucifix, as we went kneeling through the dark..." he sang slightly off-key, his tone happy and playful. She laughed, but wondered if he knew that she often thought of him when that song came on the radio. She had first heard it when she was pregnant with Jonathan, already disillusioned with her marriage. The thought conjured burning tears, and she wiped them away, hoping he would not notice.

"Hey..." He had noticed. His fingers were brushing an overlooked tear from her cheek. She managed a weak smile.

"It's nothing. Everything is perfect." He kissed her gently at the reassurance, and pulled her against him so that she could rest her head against his chest. Joyce's eyes began to feel heavy, and as she drifted to sleep, she swore she heard:

"I love you too."